

THE AMERICAN
NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 6. VOL. XIII.]

JUNE, 1839.

[WHOLE No. 150.

SERMON CCLXV.

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THE GUILT AND DANGER OF SECRET SINS.

PSALMS xix. 12.—*Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*

Most men have intimate friends, or rather intimate *companions*; for we may not call those friends who have never been *tried*—and who would forsake you at the hour of trouble. Now, how would you feel towards the preacher, who should rise up and tell you that he was going to talk about your most intimate friends—was going to expose their characters, and show you that by associating with such companions, you are ruining yourself? Would you like to have these companions named and described, when you were conscious that they are vile and unworthy of you?

You *all* have such companions; and it is about these that I am going to speak at this time. They have long been associated with you,—and the intimacy has become close.

When the Psalmist prays to be cleansed from “secret faults,” I understand him to ask to be delivered from the dominion of all secret sins.

Some men have *one* particular sin which easily besets and conquers them: some have *another*: but when the hearts of all come at last to be revealed, I suppose it will be seen that every one had some particular sin into which he easily fell:—a sin which was seen

only by the omniscient eye,—known only to the great Searcher of hearts.

These secret sins, too, are peculiarly dangerous. They probably harden more hearts, sear more consciences, and ruin more souls, than do open, day-light sins. Shall I tell you *why* they do? Why are secret sins so dangerous?

1. *Change of place and circumstances does not aid you to break away from them.*

You know that if you have fallen into *open* sins, a change of place may aid you to break from them. Men sometimes leave their home—go abroad, mingle in other scenes, in other occupations, with other companions, for the very purpose of forming new habits, and breaking away from old sins. And they are successful too. A man who is tempted to be *intemperate*, may, by going to a spot where others do not drink, and where liquors are not to be had, become a temperate man. Another who is in the habit of using profane language, may, by going among society where this vice is discountenanced, break himself away from the habit. So you may by going to a new place, easily stop violating the Sabbath;—for you can break away from tempting companions by going to another place. Young men frequently are benefitted by going to another place of residence. They can leave all their old habits behind them; they can easily begin anew. Not so with secret sins. These you carry with you: they live in any soil, they flourish under any clime. They are not destroyed by going away from home,—by change of residence,—by forming new acquaintances,—they cling to the soul. They abide with you wherever you go. Many a one has been exceedingly disappointed in this respect. He thought by a change of place, he was to change his character. But no,—the spots abide with the leopard, the darkness of the Ethiop's skin will not be washed out.

You may mingle in new scenes,—form new acquaintances,—enter new business, follow new amusements,—but if you are under the habit and power of secret sins, you meet them alone,—just as you always have done. You have no new weapons of defence,—no new means of conquering them, and they come like an armed man, and conquer you, as they always have done.

The sinner has taken his staff and gone away on the hard pilgrimage,—but his secret sins find him even on the mount of Calvary, and conquer him still. He flees to the mountains and shuts himself up in the walls of the monastery, and hopes that the thick walls will shut out sin. Alas! he finds that they will scale the highest walls,—find him in the remotest cell, and there slay him still. He calls

for the scourge and the lash, and by self-torture hopes to drive away these secret sins ! Alas ! they nestle deep within, and no scourgings will reach them. The sinner may toss on his pillow, unable to sleep, and they are not wearied ; he may fast, and they are not starved out. He may cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this sin and death ?" and the groanings do not bring deliverance. The leprosy of the soul still remains,—unabated, undestroyed.

2. *Secret sins produce a continual warfare between the conscience and the desires of the heart.*

Did you never see men becoming more and more irritable in their temper,—more morose, and apparently dissatisfied with every thing around them ? The reason, in very many cases is, (I do not say in all,) that they are dissatisfied with themselves. They are at war with themselves. They live in secret sin, and the conscience stings and clamors,—and having this painful, constant dissatisfaction with themselves, every thing without seems to go wrong. Hence they are irritable,—hence they become soured and morose.

Many a face which now seldom smiles, would look very differently were the soul delivered from the dominion of secret sin, so that the conscience might be at rest. Are there none here who can understand what I am saying ?

Did you never see men who seemed to be laboring under a premature old age, without any visible cause ? The hair becomes gray, the eye sunken, the limbs feeble, and the house of clay falling into decay in very manhood ? The reason is, in very many cases, that there is such a painful, constant warfare between the conscience and the inclinations, that the man is worn out. He lives in secret sins. He tries to break away,—his conscience upbraids him with ingratitude,—with inconsistency—with breaking his vows ; and then come his sins, rushing in like a torrent, driving out thought,—banishing reflection, leading the soul captive,—and making it a slave to sin. The passions subside,—the temptations conquer and retire, when the conscience begins to grind the soul. In this way premature old age, irritability, misanthropy, are brought on—the soul groaning in agony,—but still in heavy chains !

3. *Secret sins return often.*

Let it ever dwell in the memory that what returns often, forms the habits, controls the soul, and makes the man. It is not the fever-fit, which returns once in a great while, that is so dreadful. But that which comes often will burn and destroy the patient. Let temptations come upon the soul only once or twice in a year, and it can

recover from the shock,—it can brace itself up, it can set a double guard—it can be ready the next time. But if it comes frequently,—giving the conscience no time to recover her power—the soul no time to form new and contrary habits ;—then, those temptations are awful indeed. Other temptations can occur only occasionally. You can be tempted to dishonesty only when you are making a bargain ; to slander only when you are in conversation ; to dissipation only when in company,—to break the Sabbath only when it returns ; but at *all times* you carry your heart with you : at all times you can turn your thoughts within, and indulge in secret sins. In the morning you will, or will not worship God in the closet ; you will, or will not read his word ; you will, or will not examine the heart, and repeat this worship at evening. The morning and the evening return every day,—you will have the temptation to sin return every day,—and, if not very careful, you will fall every day.

Peter had a temptation come—it was a new one—it overwhelmed him ; he sinned ; but he repented and recovered. Judas indulged in secret sins—he carried the bag constantly, and sinned constantly : and it made him so covetous that he could sell his Lord for money ; it turned his heart into the heart of a devil, and it would have been good for that man had he never been born.

These sins which return often, destroy the soul. Could you read the heart, the aching heart of the Christian, who is striving to conquer his sins, you would find that he is the most deeply burdened with those sins and habits which he formed before his conversion. They had so eaten into the soul,—so become a part of the fixed habits of the man, that he still groans under their dominion !

4. *Secret sins counteract and destroy the means of grace !*

It is sometimes a wonder to many, why it is that this and that child of pious parents is not converted from sin and brought to God ;—why this and that one can read the word of God, and receive it as his truth, and yet not by it be made wise unto salvation ; and especially is it a matter of wonder and surprise that so many can regularly come to the house of God,—hear the gospel faithfully preached, and yet remain still under the dominion of sin. Perhaps you have wondered how it is that *you* are still as you are, notwithstanding all the means of grace which you enjoy. The reason is very plain : you may not commit open sin,—sin seen by the eye of man,—but you may be under the dominion of secret sin. The Bible is a dead letter to such a person. The preached gospel is foolishness to such a person. Why, you might have the cloud of God, and the pillar of fire hang over you,—you might stand at the foot of Sinai, when God

came down and preached,—you might hear Isaiah, or the divine Redeemer, or the eloquent Paul, or the vehement Peter ; or any preaching, and *all* preaching, and if you live in secret sin, you are not converted ! The reason is, the spirit of God does not come to set home truth upon your heart,—does not seal the soul to the day of redemption. Nothing is more loathsome to the pure spirit of God, than the heart which is constantly indulging in secret sins. He does, and will leave such a heart. And then, the means of grace will do no good. Probably this is the *great* reason why the blessed spirit of God visits us so seldom,—why he tarries so short a time. Oh ! if the sins of this audience, as they rise up in the heart, should be whispered back from the listening heavens, you would be amazed at their number,—their frequency,—but you would not be amazed that the spirit of God does not abide with us, nor that the means of grace are so inefficient ! Ah ! you may find fault with the doctrines of the Bible,—you may blame the preacher that you are not converted ; but your blood, dear hearer, be on thine own head. The deep-rooted sins of the heart,—those dear sins which you cherish in secret,—they palsy your heart,—they stop your ears,—they blind the eyes,—they are the damning sins of the soul !

5. *Secret sins give the tempter great power over you.*

The great adversary of souls, as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour. And he lays his plans wisely. He suits his temptations to the circumstances of those whom he would tempt. When he finds that he can lead a man to hardness of heart in any one way, his temptations on other points seem to be few and trifling. For example, if he can tempt a man to become a hypocrite, and to feel self-righteous, he will let him alone on other points, while he keeps *this* fire continually burning. If he finds a man who is relying on his morality and good life for salvation, he will tempt him very little to be dishonest or immoral. You will frequently see men who rely on their morality for salvation,—who seem to have few or no temptations to be dishonest ; they really have but few ; and the reason is, the great tempter sees them safe : sees them building up a hope on their own righteousness, and he has no disposition to tear it away by tempting them to open sins ! He will tempt you less to open noon-day sins, if he sees that you live in secret sins. And it is secret sins which he specially loves to have you cherish. For they do not alarm you,—do not startle you,—and he can whisper them in the ear when you are alone and off your guard. There is nothing which will give the tempter such power over you, as to indulge in secret sins. The secret doors of the heart are thus always open, and

he has unimpeded access to the soul. The great mass of sin which is committed, is secret sin : and it is this, above all others, and beyond all others, that ruins the soul forever. Oh ! if you would make damnation doubly sure, cherish those secret sins, which like a silent canker eat into the soul, and destroy your peace here and forever !

May I now ask your attention to the remedies for secret sins ?

1. *Feel that they ARE sins.*

It is too common to feel that nothing is sin which does not hurt our fellow-men. If their property or reputation be not injured,—if they be not injured by *example*, we are apt to feel that we are free. Now, we do not hurt men *directly* by secret sins. But is all sin to be against men ? By no means. Secret sins are against ourselves; they are against the health of the body ; are against the peace of the mind, the peace of conscience ; against purity and strength of intellect, (for it could be easily proved to you that a man's intellect is debased, and weakened, and enfeebled by secret sins;) but they are also against God, the highest, purest, holiest, most perfect, and glorious being in the universe. Oh ! remember that when you sin in secret, you may not injure men so much as you would by *open* sinning, but you may put yourself more completely, entirely, and forever under the dominion of sin ; you may grieve and drive the spirit of God away forever ; you may draw down the curse of God, which will leave you under the full power of sin. Every sin is against the great God ; is under his eye ; it is written in the book of his memory ; and it will come up for review at the last great day of trial.

2. *If you would be cleansed from secret sins, you must be much in prayer.*

There is an old proverb which is to the point, "that praying will make us leave off sinning ; and sinning will make us leave off praying." It is strictly true. The two things cannot go together. David felt his need of help from on high. " Cleanse thou me from secret faults ; let no iniquities have dominion over me." I need not stop to *prove* that if you pray you will stop sinning ; that is, if you pray sincerely and daily. I need not tell *how* the result will follow. The fact cannot be questioned. You go to God morning and evening in prayer, and you dare not go and sin either in public or in secret. His eye will be felt ; his presence will be felt ; his spirit will be there to aid ; and the soul will be brought under him. I would say to you, that of all remedies for sin, prayer is the most effectual ; and without this, all other remedies will fail. No resolutions will avail ; they will pass out of mind ; vigilence will sleep ; conscience will be

lulled ; but the strength which true prayer draws down will never fail you. But it must be prayer ; daily, fervent, humble, sincere. You must not first sin, and then feel remorse, and go away and pray ; but you must first pray, and then resist temptation.

My hearers, while I do not *name* those secret companions of yours ; those sins which are weighing down your soul ; keeping away peace and joy in the Holy Ghost ; which separate between you and God, I *do* ask, do you pray to God daily, constantly, fervently ? By other means you may lop off here and there a branch ; but by none other will you cut down the tree. This is the only axe that will reach the root of the tree and destroy it.

3. If you would be cleansed from secret sins, fly from temptations.

With one hand you may hold a stone in its place before it begins to roll down the steep hill-side ; but after it has once begun to roll, you would resist in vain. You cannot conquer sin by tampering with it. It can be done only by resisting the very first temptations to it.

If you are tempted to sin by particular companions ; in particular places ; at particular hours ; or in particular circumstances, the only possible way is to avoid the temptation. Flee from it as for life ! Had Lot's wife resisted the first wish to look back, she had not lost her life. Had David crushed the first sinful wish, or had he fled at once from temptation, he had not fallen as he did fall. And so it is with every one ; and with all sins. As it regards public sins, you will be likely to do so. If you are tempted to intemperance, you will naturally shun the companions, the places, or the hours, by which you have been tempted. But in regard to the sins of the heart you are in danger of not doing so.

Be careful not to trust yourself alone, except barely long enough for secret devotion. Be careful and watch over the heart, and not give way to roving thoughts, or to the delicious dreams of reverie ; the flames which they kindle will scorch the soul. Make it a part of every day's work to learn something about God's word which you never knew before. Make it the man of your counsel, and the guide of your life. Keep a good book in your room ; and from that draw materials for thought and reflection. Keep the mind full of good thoughts, and constantly add to your mental furniture.

4. If you would be free from secret sins, be constantly mindful of the presence of God.

You may have seen a man given to profaneness ; whose throat was an open sepulchre, restrained and checked by the presence of a man who loathed the taking of God's name in vain. You do not

suppose that a man could plot treason, if he were conscious that the eye of the best patriot in the land was upon him ! The eye of a mere mortal can control the tongue of blasphemy, and check the soul great in sin. How *much* more will the eye of the great God do it, if you will remember the presence of that eye ! We are apt to shut God out of the thoughts ; but, remember, when you sin, though the eye of man cannot see you ; though the tongue of man cannot reprove you, yet there is *one* present who sees all ! No veil of midnight can shut Him out. No bolting of the door can keep Him away. The sun in his brightness looks not more directly down upon you, than does the eye of our God !

Go to the secrecy of your chamber, and there sin, and you hear Him crying in your ears, "Oh ! do not that abominable thing which I hate !" You hear him cry, "hell is veiled before me, and destruction hath no covering ! Oh ! you would not, you could not, you would not *dare* to live in sin ; secret sin ; any sin, if you only realised that God is with you at all times, in all places, marking down your sins in the books of the judgment !

My hearers, I speak to you with the more feeling and earnestness to-day, because I do believe your great danger of losing the soul, and becoming the everlasting enemy of God, arises, not so much from your open, as from your secret sins. They seem small ; seem of little consequence ; but these are the little foxes which destroy the vines. Are you not ashamed to commit open sins, because man will see you ? And should you not be ashamed to commit secret sins, when God sees you ? Are you afraid of the rebukes and the reproaches of man ; the loss of character among worms of the dust ? and oh ! are you not afraid of the reproaches of conscience to eternity ; afraid of the eternal wrath and displeasure of the great God ?

The contest for your *soul* is now going on. Sin has entered your heart ; the tempter hath found an highway to that heart ; your passions, your appetites, your habits, your feelings, all draw you into sin ; while conscience, and light, and truth, and mercy, and the spirit of God, try to bring you back to heaven ! This contest is sometimes so severe that you are sensible of it ; your color comes and goes ; the spirit ; the deathless spirit within you shudders, and you are afraid ! Oh ! when will this contest end ? When will you slay every sin ; *all* sin ; bring all out, as the magicians of Ephesus did their corrupting books, and burn them ! *When* will you ? Till you *do*, sin will rule you ; sin will hurry you onward, onward, and far away from righteousness, and peace, and God !

SERMON CCLXVI.

BY REV. JOHN TODD.

SELFISHNESS THE GREAT SIN.

PHIL. ii. 21.—*All men seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.*

THE clouds which gather in the sky, and the waters which they pour over the earth, are ministers to an end. The waters minister to the earth ; the earth ministers to the grass, and the tree : the grass and the tree minister to the cattle, the flocks, and the fowls of the air ; these again, have an end, and minister to the wants, the comforts, and the luxuries of man. But man does not minister to the cloud, the stream, the earth, the grass, nor the beast ; he was not made to be the servant of either, or all of these.

What then, is *his* end ? Where does *he* centre, since every thing else, centres in him ? He must stop at *himself*, and *live* for himself ; or else he must go up higher, and make *God* his centre,—and the object for which he lives. Which *ought* he to do ?

You will say he *ought* to make *God* the centre of all, and the object, above all others, of his aims. So says the conscience ; and so says the Bible. But *do* men do this ? Do *we* ? or is the text true, all men seek their own,—not the things of Jesus Christ ?

But, you will say, may I not seek my own—my own happiness ? Is there not a natural self-love, deeply planted in every heart, and which is lawful ? I reply.—Yes ;—there is ; We are commanded to preserve our own lives, to take care of character, to take care of all our true interests for time and eternity. We are directed to love our neighbor as ourselves, which we could not do, unless we first loved ourselves :—and when we are commanded to lay down our lives for God, we are not to put off this self-love for Christ, we have it still appealed to, in the offers of eternal life as a reward.

Nor does *religion* destroy this, but on the contrary, the Christian loves himself, as he would love *any* instrument with which to honor God.

Every creature is made to honor God ; and when the Christian sees himself, (an immortal being,) brought back to become a means of promoting God's glory, he cannot but rejoice.

But though you may love yourself, and seek to gratify yourself, in eating, in drinking, in dress, in any thing till you come to a certain *point*; yet—pass *beyond* that point, and it becomes sinful. Where, then, is *that point*? I reply, it is where you place your desires or will before God's—it is where *he* has pronounced it to be sinful.

You may eat and drink, because, to a certain extent, it gratifies yourself; but the moment you do not eat and drink, and do all for the sake of glorifying God, it is sinful. You may plough, or seek for property in any other labors, but if you make *yourself* the chief end, it becomes sin. Thus, the ploughing of the wicked is sin. You may sacrifice, or pray but if you do it merely to ease *your conscience*, to secure your own exclusively, it is an abomination to the Lord.

All sin consists in seeking your own happiness, without regard to God, or any body else. Thus—*envy* is *self*, grieved that you have not, and want what somebody else has,—and if carried out, it would take what it wants at any expense of the happiness of others, that is, it would become murder. *Impatience*,—is *self*, checked in its enjoyments—or uneasy, because enjoyments do not flow fast enough. *Wrath*—is *self*, defending *self* against some evils, real, or imaginary, which have been, or are to be received. *Pride*, is a constant desire to have *self* raised above others—to be admired, to be as gods, and if carried out, would not stop short of the throne of God. Hence, *all sin*, is seeking to gratify *self* in some way or other without regard to the commands of God, or the happiness of others. Hence, in Romans, men are said to live to sin;—while in Corinthians they are said to live to themselves;—and in my text “all men seek their own.”

Hence too, it is so difficult to convert the soul to God; it is the renouncing *self*, which has been the God and the master of the soul, and enthroning Jehovah in its place.

What I have said will involve the following propositions which I propose briefly to prove.

1. *That men naturally prefer themselves to God.* This is seen in the *estimation in which we hold ourselves*. Who does not think too highly of himself, more highly than others do of him,—his talents, standing, influence! Who does not in his thoughts, compare himself with those below him, rather than with those above him. Who does not secretly cherish the thought that those above him, are really inferior to himself, though some fortuitous circumstance may now give them some little superiority?

It is seen in our taking credit to our own wisdom in all that we accomplish. When men are crossed and disappointed they charge the blame—where?—not to themselves but to *luck*, to *fortune* to

their *stars*—and to other causes! . When they are *prospered* they give credit to *themselves* ; “ is not this great Babylon which I have builded? for the house of the kingdom, by the might of *my* power, and for the honor of *my* majesty ? ”

See that worm of the dust walking on the battlement of his palace, and talking about *his* power, and *his* majesty—making in himself a god ;—and prefering himself to Him who creates nations, and hangs the heavens beaming in glory over him.

There was a certain rich man, and he said I will pull down, I will build greater—I will say to my soul, eat, drink; thou hast much goods laid up for thee, and *all* was for himself! And there came a voice from heaven, thou fool!—though thou hast preferred thyself to God, yet for all this God will bring thee unto Judgment! Have you not seen cases *very* similar? Do not men prefer themselves to God?

See how we love flattery!

Four hundred and fifty prophets shall stand and flatter Ahab; and he is pleased :—*one* shall tell him the truth, and he commands *Amon*! the Governor of the city to put him in the dungeon, and feed him on the bread and water of affliction.

The people shall shout to Herod that *his* is the voice of a God, and that poor man shall receive it all and be a god, till the Eternal rises up and hurls him into the dust of death!

Let the commands of God come in the way of the human heart; and see if the head of John, the greatest prophet ever born of woman, will not be cut off!

Our preferring ourselves to God is seen—again—*In our being so troubled at the injuries which we receive and not at all troubled by those which God receives.*

I can give you a case exactly in point. Saul was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites, even their cattle; but he was so avaricious that he chose to set aside God’s wishes, and follow his own. He does it. And when Samuel reproves him, what does he say?

Why, that he spared the cattle in honor of God by devoting them as sacrifices! too religious to obey God! And when Samuel denounces the judgment of God upon his avarice, and hypocrisy, is he concerned because he has dishonored God—No, not in the least, but he begs that *his* own honor may be provided for, and begs Samuel to honor him before the elders of Israel! And yet this same man wanted to kill his own son, Jonathan, because he tasted a little honey in the hour of victory,—not even knowing that Saul had forbidden it! So jealous for his own honor!—and *so* indifferent to that of God! Is not this just what human nature *now* is? Let a merchant

be proved to be dishonest, and at *what* are he and his friends grieved? Because God has been despised and his commands trampled on,—or because his own reputation has been tarnished?

A child grows up in indulgence,—becomes idle, vicious, wicked,—and loses all character. At what is the sorrow? that he is dishonoring God, his Maker or his family?

We command those under us to do so and so;—we are offended if they do not just as we wish them to do; and yet, perhaps the same day, we break the express commands of God, and go to our pillows entirely unconcerned!

The same thing is seen again, *in our dependence upon ourselves, and not upon God.*

You are going to undertake this and that business; its success depends on the winds, the waves, or on a thousand circumstances which *you* cannot control.

And you commence it, and carry it on, trusting to your own industry, prudence, judgment, and skill without asking the direction or the blessing of God upon it! What is this, but putting *yourself* in the place of God, and making a god of yourself?

You thus deprive God of the adoration of your heart, of the supremacy in your souls, and thus his authority is thrown off. He receives not homage for his aid, nor thanks for his goodness.

Is this *right*? Is it *honest* towards Him—and yet is it not what men do every day? Are there not those who thus serve self, and sin against light, row against the tide, and prostitute conscience in order to serve self,—forgetting that High and lofty One whose care must every moment of our lives be with us, or we and our plans all perish?

II. The second proposition which I propose to prove is, *that men prefer not merely THEMSELVES, but any thing else to God.*

To see this, consider a moment, that they think of him less than all other things.

Men will think of their business,---how they may urge it forward; ---of their pleasures, how they may increase them; ---of their families, how they may advance them and put them forward into notice,---of their insults, how they may revenge them; ---of their wrongs, how they may redress them; ---or they will give their thoughts to reverie, and let them run waste for hours,---but in all this, how few thoughts have been given to God? Why?—*why*, do they think of any thing, and every thing, rather than God? Painful truth!—because they prefer all these to him!

The corn and the wine were given to Israel to honor God with;

but when they used them to indulge in gluttony and drunkenness, they perverted the gifts.

The thoughts and *the power of thought* were given us with which to honor God ; the heart should be the altar ; and when you let the world take all these thoughts, you let, as an old French writer says, “*the unclean birds of the air ravish the sacrifices or the altars of God, and carry them to their own nests.*”

Our greedy pursuit of the world, shows that we prefer any thing for our happiness rather than God.

There can be no doubt but the old proverb is as true to-day as it ever was ;—that is, “*what a man pursues beyond all other things, that he esteems his chief good.*” This is too plain to admit of proof. If a man who might be honored and respected and useful, prefers the society of the low, the vile, and the degraded, we know, it is because he is happier there.

If a man spends his life in pursuing pleasure, we know that *he* esteems that his highest happiness.

Now do *we* not do so,---make ourselves *slaves* to the world,---so that we hardly have time to eat, or to sleep—or to think, or to serve God, so that even on the Sabbath, during the hour we spend in his courts, we can hardly keep the world and the business of the world out ?

Men prefer sensual pleasures to God.

By this I mean, that you can get men to spend more thought, more time, more money in the *luxuries* of the table, than they give of either of these to God ;—perhaps more in one year than they give to God in all their lives.

How many would feel as if they were prodigies of goodness should they give to God as much in a single year, as they bestow upon the luxuries of the table, alone which is necessary for life, or for health !

How many spend ten times as much every year for what will gratify the taste, or the eye, as they have given to God, in all their lives !—and yet, can we pretend that we do not *prefer* these to God ?

Need I speak of those who debase every faculty that is noble, and godlike, to pursue those pleasures which the very brutes pursue only by instinct ! these have been called “*sublimated brutes*,” but wrongfully—for a brute sublimated, would be far their superiors !

They prefer God as their chief good !—No----they seek their happiness in what the mere animal leaves, in what gives joy to unclean spirits only.

Language may not name, imagination may not dwell upon, what men, who would fight a duel to prove themselves to be honorable and

noble,---what such men make the object of their choice rather than the ever blessed God ! The creature, in its lowest vileness is preferred to the Creator ; the world which is God's footstool, is exalted above His throne ! Oh ! the patience of God ! while we place our desires and lusts and the basest of all things beside Him, and prefer them to *Him*, prefer a carcass to immortal life, how does He endure us !

The same thing is seen in our honoring men more than God.

Let a friend invite you to a feast, and you feel that you must go : let him invite you to visit his beautiful residence, and you must go : ---but when God invites you to meet Him morning and evening in prayer, what do you do ?---Let Him invite you to come to His table, and what do you do ? Why do you say "you are not worthy ;"---but he tells you His table is not for the worthy, but the unworthy, He calls not the righteous, but the sinner to repentance !

Let a man of fair and honorable character be introduced to you, and how kindly do you treat him, honor him, and show your whole family that you honor and respect him ! this is right ;---but when the Lord Jesus Christ is introduced to you do you take Him home to your family, invite Him to your table ; honor Him before all who come to your dwelling ? *Why do you not ? Because you prefer not to have His society !*

The same thing is seen again in your honoring the instrument of your prosperity more than God.

The heathen used to worship the arms with which they obtained their victories, this was, and is still very common, because very natural. The fishermen of old used "to sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their clay,---because they preferred to honor the *instrument* rather than the author of their gifts. Who does not know that men will honor the instrument of their prosperity, more, than Him who created the instrument ? The scholar will honor the institution which educated him : the merchant the ships which brought his goods : the sportsmen his horse ;---and all men, that which is the instrument of good. Go to the bed side of the man who is just recovering from severe sickness, and see if he be not more ready to speak of his physician and his cure, than of that God whose hand alone holds the issues of life and of death ? Why do we do this, in all our relations and circumstances of life, except that we *wish* to shut God out of the mind as fully as possible ?

More than one king has had altars erected, and had sacrifices offered to him---as to a god ? Why did they ? Because the heart of man lifts him up, and makes himself believe he is worthy of divine honors. No man ever felt that he was honored enough ;---for if we

think well of ourselves, we naturally feel that others ought also to think well of us. But this is not all. We not only shut God out of our own hearts, but we wish to fill other hearts with ourselves—so full that God shall be shut out there also. Do you suppose that those kings who received sacrifices and incense were acting out of nature—or that others, in their circumstances, would not have done just so—and we among the rest? The heart that would fill itself *with* itself and enthroned *self* there,---would enthroned itself in the next heart, and the next, and in every heart in the universe,---and this would indeed displace God. When the king of Babylon cast the three men into the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, was it because he cared for the senseless idol which he had set up, or was his wrath so hot because *his* authority was not respected?

For what has God given us food, and home and the means of enjoyment? Is it not that we may make all these things helps,---and every thing around us, helps, by which we may pass over the earth on our way to immortality.

Why do men take the creatures which God has made,---wring groans from them, and wear them out as they minister to their pleasures? is it because these are the ends for which God made them, or is it because, their ends are perverted?

What is the real, actual condition of the human heart? there is a being whom the Bible denominates the devil:---he once walked on the sea of glass; among the sons of light; he was the bright, morning star: he thought he would be like God, and equal to God; he brought down the arm of omnipotence upon himself and it placed him in a world far from heaven: Does he not *know* that there is a God whose arm he cannot resist, whose power he cannot brave, whose throne he cannot shake, whose plans he cannot thwart? And yet he sets himself up for a god,---has altars all over the heathen world,---tried to tempt Jesus to bend the knee to him, if only for a moment---why does he do so? Because his heart is full of sin---and conscience cannot restrain, and hope cannot reach him, because he is a vessel full of sin, and hates, and would dethrone if possible, God himself. Does the Bible mean nothing when it thus tells us of him, and then tells us we are of the same seed; the seed of the serpent—that he is the god of this world, and that he works *in* the children of disobedience; helps them, tempts them, blinds them, flatters them, destroys them? This is the condition of the human heart,—this is human nature sunken and fallen;---and just as yours and mine are, unless the grace of God has created us anew in Jesus.

Ah ! we may exalt self, and make a god of it---but while we do it, there is a frown gathering on the brow of God---which will destroy us.

We good ! when we do not go to God in prayer, unless we want his aid in some worldly scheme of aggrandizement?---unless when we lie on the bed of sickness, and then try to pray and coax him to spare us---unless when we have a dear friend near the grave, and then we try to bribe him to raise that friend up by our prayers and tears! *We good !* when we acknowledge not God in our daily business and pursuits, and yet are impatient and ready to impeach him if they go wrong? *We good !* when in all our aims not one in a thousand tends to God or to his glory!---when we live as far from him as we can, and keep this distance always between him and us? *We good !* when we do not remember him in our mercies, nor receive his richest of all gifts with thankfulness and gratitude!

We good ! when we do not daily converse with him and commune with him, and receive light from his word!

When we know that we wander daily, and yet rather go still further off, than to return to him---with a contrite, broken heart---asking forgiveness!---when we do not read his word---honor his Son---imitate him in our lives!

Say, dear hearer, are *we good !*---good enough to *live* as we do and to *die* as we are.

Oh hearer, we may forget our condition, and our relations to God; we may *deny* them; we may wish they were different; but all this will do no good! All men seek their own ends; their own happiness, regardless of God and of the universe, till created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

What then is to be done? To be done? Why, cease to do evil; cease to be supremely selfish; cease to dethrone God from your heart; cease to live for yourself; cease to depose God, while you place sin on his throne; cease to make self the deity, while the almighty Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, is put off, and rejected, while the soul chases shadows, flies to broken cisterns, and feeds on ashes!